

ENGINEERING SCHOOL

Address by Professor Fraenkel.

The establishment and development of the School of Engineering of the University of Western Australia, was the subject of the presidential address delivered by Associate-Professor P. H. Fraenkel to the Perth division of the Institution of Engineers of Australia on Monday night.

The University of Western Australia, Professor Fraenkel said, was incorporated and endowed by Act of Parliament in 1911, and the first Senate was appointed on February 13, 1912. Faculties for the teaching of Arts, Science and Engineering were established, and eight professors were appointed to fill the various chairs. Professor Hubert Edwin Whitfield (the present Vice-Chancellor) was chosen to fill the chair of Mining and Engineering. He had graduated in both Arts and Engineering in the University of Sydney, and had had a varied experience in the Australian mining fields. Incidentally none of the early students could be induced to take mining engineering as their principal study. It needed the revival of the mining industry following altered world conditions and the consequent high price of gold to induce young men to take up this branch of engineering. In determining the composition of the Faculty of Engineering, Professor Whitfield adopted a principle, which was later proved to be justified. He decided to appoint members of the engineering profession outside the University to sit with professors and lecturers, who were actually engaged in teaching. The first students were mostly men who had been unable to continue their studies in an Eastern States University because their employment had brought them to Perth. Nearly all of them had some engineering education at one or other of the technical schools already established in Western Australia, and they were older than students working in other Australian universities, and older than those who in later years entered the Faculty. The age of the first students had a profound influence which lasted for many years, and gave the school an advantage over the longer established departments in the Eastern States.

In the Bush at Crawley.

When the University was established, continued Professor Fraenkel, only a few men recognised that Crawley was an ideal position for its permanent buildings. One of them, Professor Whitfield, put his conviction into practice by establishing the Engineering School in the late Mr. Shenton's house at Crawley. Although the people of Western Australia could thank the professor's courage for the present

the professor's courage for the present magnificent University site, not many of the first engineering students were able to appreciate the walk of two miles through mud from Point Lewis or through sand from Broadway in order to attend lectures. The country between Broadway and the river and back to Rokeby-road, Subiaco, was dense bush. It was not until 1915 that the tram route along Mount's Bay-road was extended from Point Lewis to the University grounds, and later in the same year to Nedlands.

Difficulties of obtaining apparatus and additional accommodation were described by the speaker. "It may be," he said, "that the very inadequacy of the equipment and the fact that the students were compelled, not only to erect all machinery themselves, but also to plan new ways of getting at facts and the laws of mechanics with such primitive apparatus, made them in the end more efficient engineers than the students from better-equipped schools, and trained them to use their commonsense, and above all to think for themselves and to weigh possibilities."

When referring to the early staff of the school, Professor Fraenkel paid a tribute to the late Associate-Professor A. Tomlinson, who controlled the school during the war years, when Professor Whitfield was absent on special work in England and America. Professor Tomlinson died in 1925.

Students' Success.

Of the students, Professor Fraenkel said:—"The great majority of former students have naturally enough stayed in Western Australia. Many today hold prominent positions both inside and outside the Government services. Some critics may prefer to regard this as no tribute to the school, but as merely the result of a preference of West Australians for other West Australians. There is, however, no denying the fact, that the small minority of students who have gone overseas have been able to hold their own in competition with students from the older universities. When all due allowance has been made for the natural superiority of the West Australian, some share in the success of these students must be given to the school in which they were trained."

The address was illustrated with slides showing early students and equipment and the condition of Mount's Bay-road in the infancy of the School of Engineering.